1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

765 Soon after the death (immediately after the burial, so nearly as could be ascertained) there is an apparently ceremonial mourning, in which the matrons of the clan, and, at least to some extent, the warriors also, participate. The mourners wail loudly, throw earth and ashes or ordure on their heads, and beat and bruise (but apparently avoid scarifying) their breasts, faces, and arms. This is continued, culminating daily about the hour of interment, for several days—unless the rancheria is sooner abandoned, in which case the period of formal mourning is shortened.

In addition to the formal mourning of matrons there is a custom of nocturnal wailing after the death of warriors in battle, and, apparently, also, following the death of matrons or nubile maidens, which attracts the notice of frontier rancheros and vaqueros. According to their accounts the first note of lamentation may be sounded at any hour of the night by any of the group to which the deceased belonged; it is successively taken up by other members of the party until all voices are united in a resounding chorus of inarticulate moans, wails, shriller cries, and wild howls, likened by the auditors to the blood-bellowing of cattle; if other groups of the tribesmen are within hearing, they, too, take up the cry, so that the lamentation may extend to the entire tribe and echo throughout practically all Seriland at the same moment. The fierce howling and attendant excitement may rise so high in the group in which the wailing begins that all seem bereft of customary caution; and sometimes they suddenly seize clubs and weapons, and decamp incontinently, perhaps scattering widely and racing for miles before settling again for sleep or watchful guard.

775 The ideas of the folk concerning death and concerning the relations between the living and the dead are largely esoteric, and are, moreover, veiled by the nonequivalence of Seri expressions with the terms of alien languages.

At least an inchoate belief in a life beyond the grave was intimated by Mashém and his companions at Costa Rica, and their circumspection of speech and mien indicated a strong veneration for, or dread of, the manes; though the specific expressions were connected with deceased matrons, who alone seemed to be prominent in the minds of the clanmates. So far as could be gathered the belief seems to be that the dead find their way back to the primordial underworld, whence Earth and Beings were brought up by Pelican and Turtle (or Shark) respectively, and are liable to return by night with mischievous intent.

The direct expressions of the Seri informants are fully corroborated by the association of things in interior Seriland. The burial of water and food, of the personal fetishes and votive objects, and of the highly prized face-paint belonging to the dead matron, attests anticipation of a post-mortuary journey; while the temporary abandonment of jacales and rancherias and the nocturnal fears and flights alike betoken

773 Before this it was day all the time, but then it became night and coyote only laughs at night. The black strings still hang about badger's neck."

It is strange to find, too, that a flood legend is traditional among the Seris. Chico said: "In the times of the ancients a great flood came, the ocean rose up and all the country of the Seris was under water except the top of Cerro Alto. There a few Seris gathered and were saved. Everyone else was drowned. To this day the top of Cerro Alto is covered with brush which the flood did not submerge. All Seri children are taught this flood tradition, and they must learn it by heart so as to teach their children and their grandchildren."

764 The death of a tribesman gives no cause for ceremony among the Seris, although the nearest relatives may customarily wail, sometimes for months, morning and evening. The disposal of the bodies of the dead, is, however, of considerable interest. A hole about three feet deep is dug by means of large clam shells and a cave is excavated for the head such that the earth will not touch it. The deceased Indian is wrapped in his own blanket and laid in the grave with the head to the East, face up. The body is covered and the grave is partly filled with earth, then covered with a layer of the spiniest of chollas and thorny brush, further filled, leveled and covered with another layer of chollas to discourage the coyotes from digging up the body. When the Seris are on the move, however, and grave-digging is too great a task, a body may simply be lifted high to the fork of a giant cactus and left there.

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583 585 Marriage among the Seris is not so much a ceremony as it is the completion of a bargain. Under ordinary circumstances, when a man buys a woman he strikes a bargain with the bride's parents and makes a down payment. Only after completion of the bargain does the woman go to live with the man, but even then payments do not cease but continue intermittently through life. Chico Romero, although "married" for fifteen years, gave his wife's father some paint that he had received in payment for guiding and packing. It is also considered natural to buy and sell children. One Seri, Santo

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[text continues on p. 267 (B)]

War Chief of the Seris

622 765 There is sorrow and mourning on that little known island in the Gulf of California, Tiburon.

[164] During the last few years, many of the Seri tribesmen have succumbed to influenza and pneumonia, and many a night has the weird and melancholy wailing for the dead mingled with the soft lapping of the waters of the Gulf on the shores of that lovely desert isle.

But now a universal grief has overtaken the remnants of a once powerful and warlike tribe---Juan Tomas (*Pih-tea-xohe*, "Very Brave" in his own language)---the old War Chief of the Seris, is no more. He has fought a last and losing battle. For a month, maybe for several months, the women will wail and lament, and around the tribal camp fires, for many a night, the Seris will tell of his exploits and miraculous escapes, as they told Roberto Thomson, their friend and advisor.

[164] The old Chief died on the shores of Kino Bay opposite Alcatraz Island, probably of pneumonia.

There was no soft mattress to lie upon, no pillow to rest his head, and no roof to shelter him from sun or storm. His bed was the sand of the sea shore; his canopy, the blue heavens above, and his [163] requiem, the solemn beating of the surf on the shore. His last words were to his grand-nephews to inherit the *Sierra de las Tinajas*, and he asked the Indians and his *Yori* (Mexican) friends to protect his nephews and the mountains.

622 764 His body was wrapped in an old *serape*, fastened around by rope of native fibre. His grave was dug with paddles from the canoes, four and one-half feet deep in the sand hills near the sea. He was placed in the grave with his head to the north, face up, with the carapace of a sea turtle covering his head. Amid much lamentation and mourning, the grave was partially filled, and then a heavy layer of *cholla* cactus spread over. The grave was then filled and mounded up and covered with *chollas*, *mesquite*, shells, and thorny growths, and also a five-gallon can. The cactus spines were to discourage coyotes.